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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HAVANA 001038

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DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2017

TAGS: PINR PREL CU

SUBJECT: WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

REF: A. A) ADAMS' E-MAIL OF 10/26

- 1B. B) HAVANA 1019
1C. AND C) HAVANA 1029

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) SUMMARY: On Wednesday, October 24, Cuban state television broadcast a 14-minute excerpt of President Bush's speech on Cuba only hours after he had delivered it. The next day's issue of state-owned newspaper Granma devoted its entire second page to excerpts of the President's speech, including the three major initiatives he announced for Cuba and some of his severest criticism of the current regime. The obvious question is "Why?" Our best answer: Faced with limitations of space, time, and the fact that modern technology makes total blockage of news all but impossible, the Cuban regime chose to publish those parts of the President's speech for which it had a ready response and ignore the rest, hoping audiences on the island would do the same. END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) On Wednesday, October 24, Cuban state television broadcast a 14-minute excerpt of President Bush's speech on Cuba mere hours after he had delivered it. The next day's issue of state-owned newspaper Granma devoted its entire second page to excerpts of the President's speech, including the three major initiatives he announced for Cuba and some of his severest criticism of the current regime. The obvious questions raised by this unusual exercise in (partial) full-disclosure -- by all accounts unprecedented during the Castro era -- are: Why did the regime decide to go this route? What got left in and what got left out of the versions the GOC decided to release, and why? Our answers are of course speculative, but include the informed judgment of senior Cuban national employees, other contacts who have provided us with their opinions of the speech, as well as our own gut instincts.

13. (SBU) Many of the cuts in Granma appear to have been space-related, since the same pieces were broadcast in their entirety on Cuban state television and the paper probably did not want to devote more than one full page to the text. Cuban TV picked up the President's speech approximately half-way through, beginning where he stated, "As long as the regime maintains its monopoly over the political and economic life of the Cuban people, the United States will keep the embargo in place." Cuban television then showed the rest of the speech through to its end, including several paragraphs that did not appear in Granma.

14. (SBU) Granma's translation began with the President's opening remarks and his praise for the work of State

Department employees. The sentence beginning "Secretary Rice constantly tells me about the good work..." was cut, undoubtedly to save space. The reasons for next cut -- the portion of the speech that dealt with the circumstances under which diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba were broken in the early 60s -- are less clear. Some contacts maintain that it was untrue that the Cuban regime "...ordered American diplomats to evacuate our embassy in Havana," and therefore the cut was made to avoid a misstatement of fact. Others pointed out that, whether true or not, the statement if anything would have been beneficial to the regime's cause, and therefore the cut was likely space-related. Similarly, the elimination of the President's remarks thanking the OAS and the paragraph about the "great success stories of the past century" was likely due to space concerns, since equal or worse criticism elsewhere was allowed to stand.

¶5. (SBU) The next three cuts are significant. The language about neighborhood watches, and the fact that it is illegal for more than three Cubans to meet without a permit, obviously struck a nerve and were eliminated. The charges are well known to every Cuban. (Curiously, despite the GOC's censorship of this portion in its released versions, Foreign Minister Perez Roque brought the freedom of assembly issue up himself during his long rebuttal in a press conference held at MINREX two hours later. He said the fact that Cubans commonly gather together by the thousands for mass political rallies disproved this allegation on its face.) Likewise, the short sentence starting "Hundreds are serving long prison sentences for political offenses" was obviously not removed to save space; the capriciousness of the Cuban legal system is also well known among average Cubans and criticism of it hard to refute.

¶6. (SBU) But the most stinging allegation in the entire

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speech, according to a number of sources, was President Bush's denunciation of abuses in Cuba's housing system. Food and housing are the two most important daily concerns for the average Cuban, and while most Cubans may not necessarily eat well, at least they eat. But housing is another story, and people are indeed fed up and furious with the "ruling class" for living in mansions while they and their families are forced to reside in misery. This accusation is undeniably well-known to all, and a constant source of resentment and embitterment for everyday Cubans. Thus, there is little wonder why the regime chose to excise it from its published versions of the President's speech.

¶7. (SBU) Granma allowed the sentence in which the President referred to family members who had joined him for the occasion to stand, but then cut out all the introductions and mentions of these individuals by name. Whether the cuts were due to space limitations, GOC concerns about publicizing the names and activities of dissidents and political prisoners, a perceived lack of interest on the part of Cubans on the island, or all three, is anyone's guess. We believe they didn't want to publicize--and humanize--people that they regularly refer to as "worms."

¶8. (SBU) The final two cuts were definitely not space-related. The paragraph that began with "...calls for fundamental change are growing across the island" went on to highlight public demonstrations that the Cuban media had never covered and that most Cubans were unaware of, including large protest marches in Camaguey and Villa Clara, and a smaller demonstration in Havana. Likewise, the GOC clearly did not want to draw attention to the activities of other embassies. While U.S. support for dissidents and activists is well-known, most Cubans are probably unaware that other foreign missions are engaged in such activities as well. The GOC may fear that more embassies will want to do the same.

¶9. (SBU) The regime's edits aside, the overall question

remains: "Why?" Cuban contacts speculated that the GOC realized it would be impossible to block publication of the speech entirely and decided to release those portions for which it had a ready response. In effect, the GOC opted to engage in a "spin control" exercise, albeit one that depended upon bombast rather than logic and measured argument.

Conversations with a handful of "average Cubans" after the speech indicate that the strategy may have worked, at least initially. These individuals told us that (a) it was good that the GOC had decided to publish much of the President's speech, since (b) they could thus see for themselves that the speech contained little that was new, and (c) Perez Roque's vigorous and vitriolic rebuttal a mere two hours later at his own news conference convinced them that their foreign minister had "won" the debate. (Of course, it must be remembered that none of these individuals was privy to the whole speech, only those parts the GOC allowed to be published.)

¶10. (C) COMMENT: We believe that, faced with limitations of space, time, and the fact that modern technology would get the word out despite its best efforts, the Cuban regime chose to publish those parts of the President's speech for which it had a ready response and ignore the rest, hoping its audiences on the island would do the same. It was a gamble the GOC had no choice but to take, and may have seemed to win at first blush. While word of the speech has gotten out, it is unlikely that many ordinary Cubans saw it in its entirety.

An informal sampling of visa applicants conducted a few days after the speech revealed that 64 percent (27 of 42) had heard about the speech, all but three of them from Cuban TV. Dissidents and human rights activists listened closely, but beyond applauding calls for the release of political prisoners, which all can agree on, they tended to focus on those specific parts of the speech that they did -- or in some cases did not -- want to hear. Those hoping for a relaxation in family visitation rules, for example, were disappointed.

¶11. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: We believe the verdict is not yet in. The demand for copies of the speech from our public affairs section remains extraordinarily high: over 2200 copies in Spanish and English have been distributed to date. And now that a video version is available in both languages, more people will be able to see the genuine emotion on the faces of the President and his guests during his introduction of family members of political prisoners. Those images may end up having more of an impact than all the words combined.

¶12. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The real test will depend upon our ability to execute the three initiatives the President

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announced in regard to the Internet, student scholarships, and the development fund. Skepticism that these can be made to work remains high, since they hinge on securing a degree of cooperation from the Cuban government that it has heretofore been unwilling to provide. Still, the speech held out a measure of hope for the Cuban people, and USINT will continue to do all it can to turn the President's rhetoric into reality.

PARMLY